SQE Self-Study: How to prepare for the SQE Exam – Guide for Future Lawyers

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The SQE exam marks a new era in UK legal qualification, offering aspiring solicitors a flexible and accessible route to practise law. The Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) was introduced in September 2021 by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA). It replaces the Legal Practice Course as the primary pathway to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales. The SQE is the post-LLB stage of legal education for those wishing to practise law as a solicitor.

Whilst the SQE1 exam is designed to be taken before you commence your practical training, SQE2 aims to test that practical training and experience gained during your two-year qualifying work experience in the law. Before practising as a solicitor, you must pass both parts of the SQE. Because SQE2 focuses on your practical legal skills, whilst you can enrol for SQE 2 at any time after passing SQE1, it is best to ensure you have carried out sufficient study to ensure you pass SQE2.

This article will cover practical strategies, tips and resources to help you self-study for the SQE2 exam.

What Is the SQE Exam?

There are two examination stages of the SQE. You must pass both before practising as a solicitor in England and Wales.

SQE1 is designed to test your functioning knowledge of the law. SQE2 is focused on your practical knowledge and is assessment-based. It consists of four oral skills assessments and twelve written assessments. Ethics and professional conduct are assessed throughout the two-year work-qualifying work experience period.

Before the introduction of the SQE, aspiring lawyers had to complete a Legal Practice Course (LPC) followed by a two-year training contract with a law firm. The new structure builds the former training contract into practical work experience built into SQE2.

The SQE1 Exam

SQE1 is made up of 180 multiple-choice questions. These questions are designed to test your functioning legal knowledge covering a range of legal subjects. The questions can come from areas of law such as business and practice, dispute litigation, the legal system of England and Wales on the one hand and property practice, Wills and the

administration of estates on the other. The aim is to ensure those proceeding to the next stage have a solid understanding of the law, whether they have studied law through an LLB or have taken preparation courses to cover essential legal concepts.

The SQE2 Exam

SQE2 consists of four oral skills assessments and twelve written assessments. Each element of SQE2 is designed to test the different knowledge and skills you need to become a solicitor. The SQE2 assessments emphasise the importance of practical skills and legal research, which are crucial for demonstrating the practical application of legal knowledge.

The structure of qualifying work experience allows you to self-study for SQE2, working at your own pace and completing the assessments when you're ready. In addition, professionalism and ethics are core parts of the SQE2 and will feature throughout the SQE2 exams. Ethical and professional issues will feature but will not be signposted. You will be expected to identify ethical and professional conduct issues and describe how to resolve these.

The new SQE structure means you will reduce the time between graduation and practising as a qualified solicitor. As you go through your Qualifying Work Experience (QWE), you can study for and take the SQE2 assessments when you have built up sufficient knowledge and skills that will enable you to pass the assessments.

Why Self-Studying for the SQE?

Self-study has certain benefits for the SQE2 assessments. You can work at your own pace by deciding on the self-study route. You can set a study schedule that works best for you. You can choose where and when to study whilst you undertake your QWE. The self-study route will save money you might otherwise spend on a preparative course.

Whilst working at your own pace has benefits, you should never underestimate the challenge of self-study for the SQE. You will work independently and decide how much material you must study to pass your SQE2 successfully. Self-studying requires discipline and organisation, and you need to evaluate if self-studying is the right choice for you based on your background in the legal profession.

Keeping motivated can be a considerable challenge. You can overcome this challenge with effective planning and organisation. Decide on a study schedule and stick to it. Self-teaching complex legal concepts can be difficult, but utilising available online resources can help.

Find the right materials to support your self-study programme. Check out what study resources are available to help you, such as online course materials to support your flexible learning andsample SQE2 questions to help you understand your challenges

and how much you need to study to pass the exams.

Whatever you do, start early, make a plan and stick to it. Check and review your progress regularly to ensure you are moving towards being able to answer the types of questions you will face to enable you to pass the SQE2 assessments.

This solicitor explains the approach to passing the SQE2 assessments and includes some handy tips you might not have considered.

How to Self-Study for the SQE

Never underestimate the time and commitment required to pass the SQE exams and assessments. You need to structure your self-study time, gather support materials, and spend time studying and reviewing your progress. If you properly structure your SQE self-study, you are more likely to pass the examinations and assessments.

Alternatively, if you have reviewed what you need to do in self-study and decided it might not be for you, consider enrolling in prep courses or SQE courses offered by specialised law schools and traditional universities, which provide structured learning, expert instruction and networking opportunities.

Step 1: Understand the Exam Requirements

It is always best to consider where you want to be and then plan your journey. The aim of your journey is to pass the exams and assessments, so you must familiarise yourself with what you need to do to pass successfully.

You should start with the Solicitors Regulation Authority website, which providesextensive information on the SQE. Start at the beginning and work through the subsequent pages. One important page describing how the SQE worksfocuses on the assessments, when they are due, and the additional requirements to qualify as a solicitor.

Step 2: Create a Structured Study Plan

Creating a structured study plan or schedule is critical if you are to succeed in passing your SQE exams and assessments. That means you must set this out, list the resources you will use, and allocate your time to the range of subjects you pass in the SQE assessments and exams.

Use a study calendar and allocate the times you intend to study. Once you've allocated the time, the next stage is determining which topics you will assign to that time. Your time allocation must be disciplined and focused, making each session worthwhile.

Finally, decide on the resources you need for each session and ensure they are available before you start each study session.

Step 3: Choose the Right Study Materials

You need to choose the study materials that match your learning style. If watching and listening is your preferred study method, you might consider YouTube as your tool of choice to aid your learning. Channels like QLTS School (SQE Prep) provide hundreds of videos covering SQE topics and exam and assessment preparation.

For those who prefer to read, considerOxford University Press for your resources. Here, you will find a mix of online manuals, guidance on exam techniques and a bank of multiple-choice questions to allow you to practise for the SQE1 exam.

For those looking for interactive preparation, Barbi offers a range offlexible online prep courses designed to suit individual needs. These courses allow you to work at your own pace from any location.

You can also find a range of SQE notes, tutorials and practice questions in a modular format to help you pass the SQE exams.

Step 4: Practice with Mock Exams

The best way to test your progress is to take mock exams or assessments. You must be strict with yourself and set time limits to ensure you complete the mock exam or assessment within the same time limit as the actual exam.

One suggestion is to practice exams and assessments on an 'open book' basis for the first couple of attempts. This will indicate the range of questions you'll be asked and how to answer them to pass. Having your books and course materials available the first couple of times you do this will help you gauge the amount of study you still need to do compared to which questions you can answer with little reference to your learning materials. It is essential to practice the exams and assessments in exam and assessment conditions well before the actual exams and assessments to test your readiness.

Self-studying is crucial in this process. Using mock exams, you can independently evaluate your progress and determine if self-studying is right for you. This method helps you become more organised and consistent in your preparation.

Platforms such as the SRA,Barbi, and QLTS (to name a few) provide mock exams and feedback that are essential to establishing your readiness to sit the exams for real. Find a provider that matches your budget and check your progress with the mock exams and assessments.

Step 5: Stay Consistent and Motivated

Self-study in any subject is challenging. You must stick to your timetable and continuously check your progress. Please do not rush into it and set unrealistic timescales to achieve your goals. If you try to move too fast, you might become burned out and fail to accomplish anything.

Pace yourself. Make sure you take regular breaks. It is not unusual for students to study for forty or fifty minutes and then take a ten-minute break before returning to study. There are two things important about this method. First, when you take a break, getting up, moving around, and looking at anything besides your study materials is helpful. Second, be strict and return to your studies after your ten-minute break. Do not extend this any longer, as you will likely become distracted and fail to pick up on your studies from where you left off.

Consider creating or joining a study group. Consider creating a study group if you have friends or colleagues working towards the SQE exams and assessments. Alternatively, search online or on social media to find a suitable study group you can join. Importantly, join a study group serious about studying for the exams and assessments, not simply a talking shop that eats into your study time.

Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them

You will face many challenges when deciding on the self-study route for your SQE exams and assessments. The following are some of the key challenges you will face when you embark on your self-study adventure:

- **Lack of Guidance:** You may feel isolated as you progress through your self-study schedule. It is essential to check that you are on the right track occasionally. You might consider joining an online forum or study group. This will help you gain a sense of how you are progressing when compared to others who are at the same stage in their self-study journey.
- **Managing Time Effectively:** You must ensure you manage your time effectively. As you work through your schedule and towards your goals, it is essential to check your progress. It is crucial to ensure you are keeping up the pace and not beginning to fall behind the timetable you set for yourself. If you do find yourself in this position. Stop, review and reset. Make whatever changes to your timetable to ensure you get back on track.

- **Information Overload:** You are not expected to be an expert. You are learning the skills to become a competent solicitor, skilled in practice and across designated areas of law. You also need to identify and address ethical and professional conduct issues that will arise in the assessment questions. The SRA aims to ensure that solicitors in practice are competent, ethical and professional. You must know enough to pass the SQE exams and assessments before becoming a solicitor. Strong legal research skills can help you effectively manage and overcome information overload.
- **Balancing Commitments:** Set down your study timetable, considering your work commitments and leisure time. Any time you set aside for study must be balanced against your other daily and weekly activities. Once you have worked out what you need to achieve, you can set down the time each day or week dedicated to studying for the SQE exams and assessments. You need to ensure your work-life balance allows for leisure time, work and study to prevent focusing on one or two of these areas to the detriment of the others.

Future Trends in SQE Preparation

As a relatively new innovation in training for solicitors, having come into effect in Autumn 2021, it will be interesting to see what changes will be introduced in the coming years. The evolution of SQE courses, including those offered by specialised law schools and traditional universities, will significantly shape future trends in SQE preparation.

Preparation is key to passing the exams and assessments, and technology can help. You can ask the AI to set SQE assessment questions, and once you've answered them, ask the AI to check your answers and provide feedback. You now have many AI options, such as ChatGPT,Perplexity,Claude and DeepSeek, to name but a few.

The gamification of legal education is in its infancy. Given that most students interact with technology daily, gamification of legal education does not seem like a stretch too far. Interaction in a gaming environment may help some students learn quicker and retain more information due to its ability to engage with students in a familiar environment.

As the SQE exams and assessments are now the norm and the number of aspiring solicitors increases, the cost of online resources is likely to decrease. The broader availability of different ranges of online materials will drive down costs for the student. We are already seeing an increase in the availability of online tutors who can assist students with their SQE studies. As more students pass these courses, exams and assessments, some will become tutors to help subsequent generations of students.

Consistency, focus and determination are your keys to success

Setting a timetable, finding the right resources, and setting goals are key to self-study for your SQE exams and assessments. Once you have these in place, you must study consistently and maintain your focus to keep motivated to achieve your goals.

Practical skills are crucial for success in the SQE exams, particularly in SQE2, which evaluates the practical application of legal knowledge necessary for solicitors.

Please use the online resources available, some of which we have covered in this article, to support your SQE self-study efforts.

Once you've completed the education required to be a lawyer and once you've built up enough experience in practice, you can even think about starting your own law firm.

Our guide has everything you need to make it happen. From essential considerations to practical tools, this guide will ensure you start your law firm on the right path. Get started today.

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